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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/28/2019

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN COUP: SITREP 1, 06/28/09, 10:30 LOCAL TIME

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 504

Classified By: amb. Hugo Llorens, e.o. 12958 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Streets of Tegucigalpa remain calm for the most part as of 10:00 local time (12:00 Washington), although black smoke was seen rising from the area around the Presidential Palace around 08:30, apparently from burning tires. One source at a nearby hotel reported seeing a car burning. A military helicopter has been circling low around the area, according to Embassy personnel who live nearby. There are also reports of demonstrations in front of the National Congress. We have put additional guards in front of the Embassy as a precaution.

12. (U) Toncontin airport remains open for international flights, and American, Continental and Delta airlines continue to operate flights as usual. Taca has cancelled its flights today.

13. (U) The Embassy will be open only for emergency services June 29.

14. (U) Internet and landline communications are down, but people are still able to make international calls by celular phone. All local television stations have ceased broadcasts. Cable channels are still transmitting. However, Spanish CNN went dead just after 09:00, as it was broadcasting information about the situation here. Sources who were watching at the time report that the network had just announced that President Zelaya would be making a statement from Costa Rica, which it planned to carry. The English CNN went off the air just after 10:00.

15. (C) Military contacts told us they were motivated to act in part because of rumors of Venezuelan or Cuban intervention, although no such rumors were confirmed.

16. (C) President of Congress Roberto Micheletti told the Ambassador he would not allow Zelaya back into the country. The Ambassador has spoken to both Micheletti and Supreme Court Chief Justice Rivera Aviles to condemn the military action. The Ambassador has also reached out to other political leaders, including former President Carlos Flores and Liberal Party presidential candidate Elvin Santos, both of whom denied any knowledge of or involvement in this morning's actions.

17. (C) Christian Democrat leader Arturo Corrales, told PolCouns the military decided it had to act last night because of the decree issued for publication in the Gazette, which is printed in today's La Tribuna, in which he said Zelaya convokes a Constituent Assembly, something that can only be done by the Congress. The concern was that Zelaya would suspend the congress and the courts. Corrales said Zelaya's resignation letter (which he says he has seen) would be presented to the Congress today. Congress will then begin to build the various cases against Zelaya, including convening an illegal constituent assembly, his trip to the Air Force HQ to pick up the confiscated urns, his refusal to present a budget, etc. The courts will rule against him, and Micheletti will be named as acting head of state.

18. (C) The Executive Director of the Cortes Chamber of Commerce, the most important business chamber in the country, told EconCouns members were extremely disturbed by the latest developments and worried about possible implications for U.S. assistance, including Millennium Challenge. He said he thought Micheletti had acted improperly in ordering Zelaya's arrest and risked turning Zelaya into a martyr.

LLORENS